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PROLOGUE

To my dear children and grandchildren:

This is going to be a very unpleasant story to read or to listen to, but I think you should all know what we went through during the German occupation of Europe so that it will never be forgotten and I hope never repeated.

THE OUTBREAK OF WAR THROUGH THE EYES OF A TWELVE YEAR OLD

It happened in September 1939. I was only twelve years of age. The first thing the Germans did was close all the schools for Jewish children. We were seven children at home - four sisters and three brothers. Heniek (Henry) at twenty nine, was the eldest; next came Mietiek (Mark) who, as far as I can remember, was twenty six; Klara (Clara) was eighteen; then came Andzia (Anne) who was sixteen; Marisza (Marianne) was fourteen, I think; then there was Genia (Gina) who was thirteen; and at twelve, I, Maniek (Mourice), was the youngest. We were a very close family. My parents were modern orthodox Jews. We had a kosher home and my father went to Synagogue every Saturday and on Jewish holidays. We lived in a city called Wadowice (pronounced Vadovitzeh in English), in southern Poland, not far from the Czechoslovakian border. My father had a shop selling menswear and we also had a restaurant.

On that fateful day in September the Germans bombed our city and one of the first bombs fell on the building where we had our restaurant. The owners of the building, a family of three, were killed. Fortunately, being a Saturday, the restaurant was shut. People started to panic and everyone tried to leave the city. We were very lucky as we were able to get a car but first my mother went to the Rabbi to ask if it was permissible, under the circumstances, to drive on the Sabbath. He told her that if he had the opportunity, he would go too.

My parents decided to go to Dzialoszyce (pronounced like Jaushitzeh in English), about 150 kilometres away. It was chosen because they were originally from there and they thought it was sufficiently distant from the war zone and small enough to be insignificant.

When we arrived we were fortunate to be able to rent a little house. It consisted of only one bedroom and a kitchen so you can imagine it wasn't very comfortable for our large family. We had just come from a three bedroom house which, by Polish standards, was very large. Nighttime was a problem with very little room to sleep. We made our beds on the floor but I must say we knew just how lucky we were so we made the best of it.

THE BICYCLE TRIP

It didn't take long for the Germans to win the war against Poland. My parents decided that my mother and three sisters would go back home otherwise someone would take over our vacant house. If things settled down we would also return. When weeks went by and we had received no mail, my father started to worry that something terrible had happened. I could see what anguish he was going through. I asked him to buy me a bicycle so that I could go to see them. My father looked at me, put his arms around me and started to cry. He said, "How can I send you, you are only a child?" I had two brothers, both much older, and one was in the Polish army. I wanted to go because, being so young, I hoped the Germans wouldn't do anything to me. But my father couldn't decide whether to allow me to go.

Weeks went by and my father became increasingly sad. I asked him again and again. I could see how he was feeling. I didn't stop nagging him but, believe me, as much as I wanted to do this I was really very frightened. I might have to ride the bicycle at night. I was, however, very determined. I begged my father again and again until eventually I got my bicycle. I was very excited. I really wanted to do this for my father.

The next day we got up very early, my father made me breakfast and then I was ready to go. I really can't tell you how my father felt. I said goodbye, not looking into his face. I got onto the bicycle and started on my way.

I had to cover a distance of 150 kilometres and so my main worry was to reach home before dark. I didn't stop looking at my watch. I was very frightened because I was passing thousands of Germans in tanks and trucks, but I was desperate to bring news to my father. After riding six or seven hours I was more than half way. I looked at

my watch, it was eleven in the morning.

I sat down for a while and had something to eat and then started out on the bicycle again. I was getting closer to home so I began counting every kilometre. When I was twenty kilometres from home I heard someone shouting: "That boy on the bicycle is a Jew." Can you imagine if the Germans had heard? I was very scared. I rode the bicycle as fast as I could and, believe me, it didn't take me long to reach home.

When I arrived at the house, I knocked at the door and our dog started barking. I was sure that he knew who was knocking. When the door opened, the dog went wild and I don't have to tell you about the rest of the family. I had a good wash and we all sat down to dinner but because I was so excited I couldn't eat anything. I told my mother I had to go to bed early for a good sleep as I had to get up early in the morning. My mother asked me to stay one extra day so I could have a proper rest but I was very determined to take the news to my father that everyone was safe and well.

The next morning after I got up my mother made me breakfast and made sure that I had everything. She blessed me and I said goodbye. I had a really good ride and I could soon see that I was going to make it; I had no problems at all. When I arrived back home I looked at my watch to find I was two hours early. I knocked at the door and my father wasn't home. I forgot that it was a Jewish holiday. I went to the Synagogue to see my father and I really can't adequately describe the depths of his emotions. He took me in his arms and said: "Thank God my child, you're here."

THE FAMILY IS REUNITED

Before too long the mail service resumed and we were able to correspond with the family. Later it became even easier - we were able to receive mail every week and send them parcels of food. As time went by, the only wish we had was to be together again as one family, but things were not so easy. We received notice that the Germans were going to make Wadowice, our home town, part of the Third Reich. That meant that there would be a border between us and our mother and sisters. Soon the border was erected and we realised we would not easily be able to see each other again. We all went about as if we were in mourning and spent each day thinking there must be something we could do.

One day we heard there were people who, for a lot of money, would smuggle my mother and three sisters across the border. We really didn't know what to do; it wasn't the money that was the problem but the risk involved. Eventually we concluded that we had no alternative, so we decided to take the risk.

The border crossing was arranged for a Sunday morning so my mother and sisters set out on Saturday night and were to be picked up by a man who would take them across. His house was not far from the border. The best time to get through was when the Germans were changing guard. They got to the station without any problem and departed for Krakow but they were still taking a big risk because Jews were not allowed to travel by train or bus. They had to wear a yellow band with the star of David on their arms. Fortunately, everything went well.

The next day they arrived in Dzialoszyce. This was the most enjoyable time in our lives. We were all together again. The only one missing was Heniek, our eldest brother, who was away in the army. We later received a letter from him to say that he had been taken prisoner of war, but after two months he was allowed to come home. Now our only wish was that the war would come to an end. We were a happy family again. We almost forgot all the bad things the Germans were doing but from day to day it was getting worse.

THE SITUATION DETERIORATES

The Germans were taking all the able men for hard labour building roads. People were beaten and there was not much to eat. They stopped Poles selling anything to Jews, so whatever we did we took a risk. They formed a Judenrat which was a Jewish committee and every day the Germans forced this committee to come out with new oppressive restrictions. It was getting impossible to live. They asked Jews to supply quantities of gold and if they were not able to do so, they were killed. Such things were going on every day. Then we found out that people who had been transported had all been gassed. Fortunately, our family were untouched but we had the feeling something was going to happen. We tried to make preparations.

We knew some Poles, the Novaks, who lived on the land just outside of Dzialoszyce. They used to come into town to barter their farm produce for my father's menswear.

We had built up a relationship with them from the time we first moved from Wadowice to Dzialoszyce. They promised that if anything happened they were willing to take us in and, hopefully, the war would not last forever. The trouble was that our parents decided not to come with us. We begged them but there was no way we could convince them. It might have been because at the Novaks' they knew they would not be able to get kosher food but more likely they would not come because they had no inkling as to what their fate and the fate of all Jews would ultimately be under the German occupation. They told us to make a hiding place for them, so we had no choice but to agree and we dug them a hole behind shrubs in the garden. We put in plenty of food and blankets and had it all ready for when the time might come.

We also hoped that our sister, Marisza would be able to look after our parents. She had a good position with the Germans and had papers saying that the Germans needed her. Our parent's hiding place was not very comfortable or secure but we hoped that a miracle would occur. Unfortunately, in those days, there were no miracles.

It didn't take long before a neighbour came to us and said: "You have to go. The Germans are coming and are killing every Jew they see." So again, we asked our parents to come with us. Again they refused. We were all in tears but we didn't have much time so we took our parents into the hiding place. One day before, the Rabbi had asked everyone to go into the cemetery to pray. It seems an odd place to have chosen for prayers but I believe it was some kind of superstition. I was there with my parents and I heard them praying: "Please God, take us but let our children live."

WE GO INTO HIDING

Our house was outside the city and we could hear the shooting going on. It was time to go. We looked in at our parents again and left them with heavy hearts. We locked the house and set out to get to the Novak's place. We could see hundreds of people running here and there; they didn't know where they were going. We arrived safely, and the Novaks took us into their hiding place. It was underground covered with straw and even though it was winter time, it was quite warm.

The Novaks looked after us but we were worried about our parents so two days later we asked Mr Novak if he could go and see if our parents were all right. He promised that if all was well he would go and see them in the morning. He told us he would bring them back with him if he could convince them to come. We cried for joy. In the afternoon Mr Novak returned. As soon as he came into the hiding place, we could see that something was wrong. He told us that our parents were not alive any more. He had heard from our former landlady that there had been shooting and our parents, in fright, had left the hiding place and climbed a fence. A Polish policeman saw them, killed them, and then took all their money and jewellery. They were left covered in blood.

Just after this, my sister Marisza had arrived to see if our parents were all right. You can imagine what the sight of our dead parents did to her. She became hysterical. A Pole saw my sister and begged her to get away but she wouldn't listen. I don't think she knew what she was doing. She stayed there until the Germans came and took her away and we later heard that her life ended in Treblinka. I honestly think she was the best child in our family.

By now it was September, 1942 and I had lived for three years under German occupation in Dzialoszyce. We were without parents and our dear sister. In the hiding place we didn't have much to eat but after all that had happened we didn't have much appetite. Three weeks later the Germans declared an amnesty. They suspected that there were still a lot of Jews in hiding so in order to find them they announced that Jews could all go home and nothing would happen to them. We all knew that it was a trick but we were willing to take the risk because if we were able to go home we could sell all our possessions and have ready cash which we might use to help save us.

We arrived home and decided that our best chance of survival would be with forged Christian papers. We got in touch with the underground people who were making the forgeries and after some time to our great relief, the papers arrived. The only problem was we couldn't get them registered but this was a risk we had to take. The Germans soon came back, a bit too soon, because we had not managed to sell everything. We left home, taking what we could, and hid everything else in a shed. We knew we would not be coming home again.

We all went back to Mr Novak's hoping he would let us back in but we had no trouble. The Novaks had two children, both girls, six and eight years of age. They were a very nice family but they really didn't realise what trouble they were letting themselves in for if they were caught. We gave them lots of money but to stay alive one or two days longer was worth everything. They knew we still had money and jewellery left and that soon they would have everything we possessed. Unlike many other Poles, Mr Novak was honest. Stories abound of Jewish families who had been hidden by Poles, stripped of all their possessions, and then murdered. Mr. Novak wouldn't do this kind of thing.

After a few weeks, things deteriorated. Mr Novak came in and we could see he had something important to tell us. He said he knew we hadn't anywhere to go but he had two little children and he was taking a terrible risk. Poles caught harbouring Jews were immediately shot along with their entire family. We were able to appease him by giving him money and subsequently, whenever he visited us with his worries, we tried to satisfy him with money and jewellery. But after a few more weeks we had given him everything we had brought with us into hiding. The only way we could stay safe now was to tell Mr Novak we still had some very valuable things hidden in Dzialoszyce.

TWO NARROW ESCAPES

I must tell you that it wasn't really Mr Novak who was interested in our possessions, it was Mrs Novak. He was happy for us to stay but she was edging him on and so it wasn't long before he again told us we had to leave. We asked if we could stay a bit longer and told him we would get the things we still had hidden. The problem was: who was going to get them? There was a great risk involved. We were not so much frightened of the Germans as of the Poles who were much worse. If we were lucky and were able to safely bring our things over from Dzialoszyce, there was a chance that the Novaks would keep us a few more weeks.

As I have told you, there were only three sisters and three brothers left, and I was the youngest. My eldest sister Klara asked my eldest brother Heniek if he would go with her but his answer was, "No.". Then she asked her younger brother Mietek if he would. He said he would like to but he was really too scared. The other sister Andzia didn't say anything. I told Klara that I knew the way and if she agreed I

would go with her. She wasn't very happy about it because I was only a child but there was no alternative.

The next day we waited until about 4 o'clock in the afternoon so we would arrive in the city during darkness. We were taking a great risk because there were now no Jews in the cities - they were either dead or in concentration camps. We travelled on foot sticking to the forests as much as possible. Half an hour after we left however, we were in big trouble.

We had to cross a main road about six kilometres out of Działoszyce. We were accosted by a Pole on a horse and buggy. He appeared to recognise me although he didn't seem to recognise my sister Klara, "Come here you bloody Jew. You're worth a kilogramme of sugar to me.". I told him I wasn't a Jew but he answered, "I know you, you live next to the Church in Działoszyce. I shall enjoy watching you get shot.". Later it occurred to me that he must have been one of the Poles who had come to buy things, during the amnesty, when we were selling all our belongings. I could see that he was determined to stop me but I don't think he realised that Klara was a Jewess. I whispered to Klara to separate from me and run to a cross that we could see over in front of the line of forest. She did as I asked even though she was almost petrified with fear. Then I started to run.

The Pole whipped his horse so that it took fright and reared. He was hoping I would be trampled. He did this repeatedly while yelling, "Catch the bloody Jew.". At this crossroad there were little peasant huts and so men armed with knives came running. They stopped me. I cried, "Jesus Maria, he's drunk and he thinks I'm a Jew. I'm not a Jew." The Pole was trying to control his horse and was temporarily distracted. The peasants seemed to half believe me and relaxed their grip. That was all I needed and I bolted away before they realised their mistake. I ran to the rendezvous spot where my sister was waiting and lay down exhausted.

As dusk fell we set off and hoped we would not experience the same as before. The remaining distance to our former home was about eight kilometres. Once we reached the cemetery we were almost there but as we walked through, spotlights, which had been set up around the city perimeter, almost picked us out. It was very frightening. We lay down on the ground and I realised, after a while, that the only way we could reach our destination would be to crawl, so we did.

When we finally reached home our main worry was; would our landlady, who was like a concierge, let us in? This for her was a great risk. When she saw us she was speechless with surprise and fear. I can't blame her - to let a Jew into her house would mean a death sentence if she was caught. We told her not to worry and tried the next-door neighbour's, a family of fifteen. When they saw us, they didn't panic, but asked us to come in and offered us food. They were very decent people and as former neighbours, we were in a sense "their" Jews to be looked after in a way that probably conflicted with their attitude towards Jews in general. We told them we had come to retrieve things we had hidden in the shed. They said they would help us which was a big relief because we were not sure what attitude they might take. A few minutes later our landlady appeared, ashamed and apologetic for turning us away. She said she had been terrified when she first saw us. In any case we were pleased that she seemed to have had a change of heart and would not hinder us getting our valuables from the shed.

We finished our tea, managed to get everything out of the shed and one of the sons offered to escort us through the cemetery. This time we were very lucky; there was no trouble. He wished us good luck and returned home. It was about eleven at night. We tried to avoid the main road and mostly kept to forest tracks. After walking for a while we could hear what sounded like a horse and carriage. I reassured my sister that it was unlikely to be coming our way, but unfortunately, it was and as it got closer we could see it was a German Gestapo man and a civilian. They stopped us and the civilian asked what we were doing out so late at night. Holding my sister as if she were my lover I said with a wink, that it was the best time to be out. We recognised the civilian as a doctor who lived a couple of houses away from ours. I am sure he recognised us; we had formerly been quite friendly. Later we surmised that the doctor must have been summoned by the Gestapo to treat a patient and they had taken a short cut through the forest. He must have convinced the German that we were indeed just lovers because we were allowed to go on our way. We figured that if it hadn't been for the doctor we would not be here today. We continued on and reached our hiding place.

In the morning Mr Novak came to see if everything had gone well. He seemed genuinely happy to see us. Mrs Novak sent us a very nice lunch, and then tried to find out what we had brought back with us. We gave them as much as we could, but

knew that if we could stay there a few more weeks, it would be a miracle.

WE LEAVE OUR HIDING PLACE

One day Mr Novak came in and told us that the Germans were searching every house. He wanted us to go. We begged him to let us stay a few more days and used the time to try to organise ourselves. We did not know what to do. Our eldest brother Heniek said that the time had come when we must all look after ourselves, so we decided to share the money that we had left. Heniek said he might try to make his home somewhere in the mountains. A few days later my eldest sister Klara left and through contacts in the underground she had made when she bought forged papers, she found a job as a housekeeper in Krakow. She soon found jobs for our other two sisters. My brother Mietek and I were still left with Mr Novak.

One night Mr Novak said I could stay because people knew I was working for him. I said I would but my brother had to stay as well. He said that that was impossible so we decided to leave together the next morning, not that we had anywhere to go, but we resolved to catch a train and meet up with our sister Klara. She was waiting for us at the station and we were very happy to see her. She couldn't find anything for us. We walked in Krakow for hours. Eventually we decided to go to the station to sleep. This meant taking a great risk since there were Germans everywhere but, as I said before, we were more frightened of the Poles than the Germans.

BREAKING IN TO THE CONCENTRATION CAMP

I know it sounds very strange to say this now, but we decided to go to our first concentration camp because it seemed the safest place to be. We survived one night at the railway station at Krakow but we had to find somewhere to go. On the street, sooner or later, a Pole would suspect us of being Jews, denounce us to the Germans, and we would be shot. Just giving ourselves up to the Germans wasn't the answer either because rather than being sent to a camp, we would most likely have been immediately executed. So the next day we went to Dekertha Street where an outside work detail were labouring daily, laying a new railway line. There we met somebody from our city and asked him if there was any chance we could get into the camp. He told us that it was almost impossible but if somebody died we might be able to take his number. Eventually, after lots of trouble and after a guard was

bribed, we managed to get into the camp.

It was called Ulag 1 and was under the command of Obershafsfuhrer Miller. There were thousands of Jews, guarded by Ukraines and Jewish policemen but we were happier than we had been hiding underground at Mr Novak's house. Here we were in German hands but what time we had left to live we could at least breathe fresh air. So now it was time to get used to a new life.

The facilities at the camp were not too bad. We were allowed to have a shower, we slept six to each three decker bunk which was better than most places, and the food we were given was just enough to live on. Things were smuggled into the camp so that if you had money, you could buy everything. We went to work every day outside the camp. Our job was to build special train lines for the army. The work wasn't easy. We were guarded by Germans and the civilian foremen were German too. There were Jewish guards as well and they were as bad as the Germans. We left for work at 7 a.m. and returned to the camp at 6 p.m.

Five minutes from our camp was another concentration camp called Plaszow which we passed every day. Seeing the kind of work those poor people were doing and how they were beaten, made you want to close your eyes so you couldn't see. For instance, as part of their work some prisoners had to carry a brick on each shoulder. If they didn't run but merely walked with them or if a brick fell they were beaten with truncheons by the kapos or with rifle butts if it was a Ukranian guard. A kapo was a trustee or overseer in charge of work detail, or some other branch of a concentration camp such as a hospital or kitchen. Kapos were drawn from amongst us camp prisoners, sometimes from the criminal elements or those willing to do the German's dirty work for an extra crust of bread. The kapos were just as bad as the Ukrainians or perhaps even worse, because they were trying to prove themselves to their German masters. We hoped the same wouldn't happen in our camp. We lived from day to day.

TYPHOID STRIKES AND I LOSE MY BROTHER MIETEK

Often our Ukrainian guards would come around at night inside the camp and ask for money or jewellery. They terrified us. If you said you had nothing, they would kill you on the spot and they killed as many as they liked, no questions were asked.

As weeks went by, things got even worse. There was an epidemic of typhoid so they didn't need to kill us any more as people were dying like flies.

My turn soon came and I was taken into the hospital with typhoid. The hospital was not really a place where you got well; mostly you died there. It was an ordinary barrack but there was a Jewish doctor and you had your own bed. The bed however, was crawling with bed bugs. These would bite you so that you became so itchy you were besides yourself. I became blind for a few days. On one of these days a Gestapo officer, who was the number one man in the camp, came into the hospital while I was trying to get out of bed. He must have seen that I was blind and asked me what I was doing. I knew he was likely to tell one of the guards to take me out and kill me in front of everybody - this sort of thing was happening every day. But, I couldn't believe it, instead he called the man in charge and said he would send a bottle of medicine and it should be given to me three times a day. With the medicine he would also send a loaf of bread. The following day he came and made sure I had been given the medicine and the bread. It's not that this Gestapo fellow was good hearted - one of his amusements was to find anyone amongst the prisoners who had a moustache, stand them side on at twenty paces and try to shoot the moustache off their lip. If he missed, prisoners were expendable. Sending me the medicine was just a whim. He might have felt sorry for me after watching me, weak and blind, trying to get out of bed.

One week later, I tried to go back to work although I was still very weak but I didn't want to stay back at the camp. They were checking the barracks nearly every day and if an excuse was not good enough for them, they would kill you. At work I could hardly lift the shovel but my friends covered up for me until I got a little better. Soon after, my brother Mietek went to hospital and I told him to get out as soon as he could too. I went to visit him twice a day. He was very sick and had an extremely high temperature but eventually, when I went to visit one morning, he seemed much better. I left him and went to work but when I got back to the camp I sensed something was wrong. I soon found out what had happened. During the day, an order had come through to the camp to kill five hundred Jews, so instead of killing healthy people, they injected methylated spirits into those who were in hospital. This is how I lost my brother.

I was now on my own, and I didn't know if I wanted to go on living. I was lucky to

have close friends with me in the camp and they encouraged me to continue.

STRIPES AND AN INCIDENT WITH A JACKET

One day we came back from work to the camp to find that the main gate, which usually opened automatically, remained shut. The Germans then counted us, took out every tenth person, and the rest of us were allowed to return to our barracks. A few minutes later that group were all dead. It was because there was one person less in the count of prisoners returning from outside work. But these things were just as likely to happen without any explanation. The situation got so bad that people were running away every week despite orders that the Germans were to shoot one hundred prisoners for every person who absconded. It wasn't long before new orders came to the camp and everybody had to have all their clothes painted in stripes. All these orders came from a German Officer called Get in Plaszow. He was known to us prisoners as the "Bloodlover" because in one day he had personally killed a thousand Jews. One of his sports was shooting prisoners from his window with a hunting rifle.

One Sunday they told us not to go to work. A Gestapo officer, who was second in command to Get and whose name I seem to recall was John, was sent to our camp to supervise the painting of our garments. Everything we wore had to be painted with red stripes so it wouldn't be so easy to run away. Everybody had to leave the barracks and they announced over the loudspeakers that whoever didn't leave the barracks would be shot. We all formed queues and the Germans and the Jewish police supervised. We stood for hours until all our garments were painted.

One young boy, who hardly owned any clothes and so had very little on, was to be next. The Gestapo man looked at him and said, "You dirty Jew", and gave him a few slaps on the face and then told the Jewish policeman to get him some clothing so he could have it painted. Next to me was a Jewish policeman and as a joke I said that I wouldn't mind a few slaps if it meant getting new clothes. Did I open my mouth at the wrong time! This man wanted to make himself important, so he went to the Gestapo man and told him there was a boy who wouldn't mind a few slaps to get some clothes. I couldn't believe he could do such a thing knowing very well that I could be killed. This was the sort of person who became a Jewish policeman. I was shivering with fear but this time it was to be the policeman who would be in fear for

his life. The Gestapo man told him to get the boy. Well, I knew what to expect now. As I walked closer, I thought that in a few seconds I would be dead. I stopped close to him and greeted him. "Gutten tag, Herr." He looked at me and said: "Tell me my boy, what do you need?" I told him that I could do with a jacket. On hearing this he told the Jewish policeman to go to the storeroom to find a jacket, but this jacket had to be the best one in the storeroom and if he himself could find a better one, the Jewish policeman would be shot. I had never seen anybody panic like this policeman. He went to the storeroom to look for a jacket and came back with one for me to try on. It fitted me beautifully. I decided to go to the German to thank him. He looked at me and said: "That jacket looks nice, but winter is coming and you would probably be better off if you had a warm, winter overcoat instead." He asked the policeman to go to the storeroom again and pick an overcoat for me and it had to be as nice as the jacket. He told the policeman to wrap the jacket and give it to him. If only the policeman had known what trouble he was starting, he wouldn't have informed on me. I think the most likely reason the Gestapo man asked for the jacket was that nearly all Germans of high rank had a Jewish boy about my age - they used to call them the shoe cleaner - and I think he wanted the jacket for his boy. Such kids, while they lived, had plenty to eat and some were treated like part of the family but, of course, they were subject to the whims of such officers.

Thinking back now and remembering that the Gestapo man had said that winter was approaching, I reckon that the incident with the jacket must have occurred in the autumn of 1943. I left Novak's and entered the camp in October 1942 and so by now I had been in the concentration camp one year. I know this because I have a poem, written by my sister Genia while we were in hiding and sent to me by the Novaks after the war. It is dated 25th September 1942 and we left Novak's within a month of that poem being written.

MY SISTER ANDZIA IS PICKED UP

The atmosphere was changing - we all suspected that when our job building the railway line was finished, we most likely would be put against a wall and shot. Whenever the Germans received bad news, their mood turned ugly and we were the ones to pay with blood. As time went by we saw thousands of injured Germans returning home from the Russian front. As I told you, we were building the train

lines for them and so we were able to see what was going on.

Sometimes my sister Klara, who had Christian papers, came with food which she could pass to me without too much difficulty because I worked outside the camp. She really should not have come because the risk was so great. In fact, for a while she didn't come but after a short time she was back with very bad news. One of our other sisters, Andzia, had been picked up and Klara thought she had been taken to Plaszow. Someone had denounced her to the Germans who only had to check with the local registry to determine that Andzia's Christian papers were false. We had a cousin in Plaszow, Henry Levy, and I tried to send a message to see if he could find out if my sister was there. Like me, he was working outside the camp and so there were opportunities for me to communicate with him. It didn't take long for him to let me know that he had seen Andzia and, so far, she was all right. Andzia and I then exchanged messages regularly through our cousin but then I didn't receive any more news for a few days. Then I heard why - when Henry went back to the camp one evening, the Germans searched him and found a piece of sausage in his pocket. He had probably bought it from a Pole to take back to his wife in the camp. For this they killed him on the spot. These sorts of things were happening daily.

In Krakow the situation was deteriorating too. The Germans had uncovered an underground printing press and lots of ammunition. This resulted in a doubling of the guard and extra street patrols so my sister Klara couldn't come to see me any more. From day to day life was getting harder and harder. They strengthened the guard at work too. We could feel that something was going to happen and in the camp they were just killing anybody.

We had one man working with us, a Jewish locomotive engineer, who was the father of two young boys. He was number one with the Germans because he was so good at his job they almost would not have coped without him. There were other professional people like him who lived outside the camp in their own special barracks. They really had it made. They weren't allowed out at night but during the day they didn't have guards. As time went on the Germans decided that these highly skilled people could stay where they were but their wives and children could no longer stay with them and had to live inside the camp. It is not as if those children were not all working as well, but this was an order. When they took the locomotive engineer's children, he told them that they would have to take him too. I said before

that the Germans needed him but it made no difference. They killed his children, his wife, and then they killed him. So you can see how things were steadily getting worse.

I CHANGE CAMPS

One night we could hear a fight going on at Oberschafsfuhrer Miller's house and it went on for a long time. Our barracks were not very far away and we could hear the shouting. The next day it was rumoured that the "Bloodlover" had told Miller his people were not working hard enough. Miller did not like it but unfortunately Get was the one giving the orders. After a few days Miller was sent to the front and we later heard he was killed there. We prisoners had to be transferred to Plaszow. Well, one may as well have been dead. The only thing I was happy about was that I might be able to see my sister. The next morning we departed.

From our camp to Plaszow was a very short distance, but on the way a lot of people from our camp were shot for either no apparent reason or for the most minor transgression. Because there were no barracks for us at Plaszow, we were made to wait in the assembly area. It was well known that there were mass graves under it. As it turned out, we were only there for two days and during that time I did my best to find out something about my sister. I was told she could not see me but that she was all right. I worried a great deal about not being able to see her. The next day we were going to be transported - where? - nobody knew. I don't think any of us worried about it because it couldn't get much worse.

Early the next morning, the Germans came with trucks and dogs and took us to the station. They opened the carriages normally used for transporting pigs and threw us in as though we were pigs. There wasn't a bit of space to move. Nobody knew our destination but there were all kinds of rumours going around. The smell in the carriage was unbearable. If only we could have a drink of water. We travelled the whole day without food but by late that evening we seemed to have arrived. Our carriages were opened and we could hear shouting, "Raus, raus (out), you bloody Jews."

When we got out, we saw Jewish policeman so we realised it must be another camp. It was called Skarzysko Werk C., consisting of a labour camp with a factory

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manufacturing ammunition. I must say I hadn't seen anything like this - it was really bad. As we walked into the camp, we saw men and women as thin as skeletons. The clothing that hung off them was made out of cement bags. We had to stay in our barracks until the next morning when we were segregated into work details, to be placed wherever we were needed. I was picked to load and unload ammunition. Later, we were able to go back to the barracks and we spoke to some of the inmates, many of whom had skin that had turned yellow like canaries.

In Skarzysko there were three camps called Werk A, B and C. Unfortunately, we were told that camp C was the one that nobody came out of alive. The camp was hidden in the forest and it was very strictly guarded for two reasons: firstly, to make sure none of the Jews could run away and secondly, because it was an ammunition plant. The guards were Ukraines and Mongolians who should have been in the war on the side of the Russians but they had surrendered to the Germans. The Mongolians guarded outside the gates where the ammunition factories were and the Ukraines guarded inside the camp.

The next day at 5 a.m. a Jewish policeman came to wake us up. The coarseness of his language was beyond belief but between the swear words he told us his name and said he was our overseer and we'd better behave and listen to whatever he said. He wanted us to be ready for work in five minutes in front of the barracks. There we were counted and he asked us to sing and march like soldiers. On the way we could see lots of others also going to work but they could hardly walk and you could barely recognise them as people any more. They were beaten by the Jewish policemen - it was heart breaking.

We arrived at a platform where lots of carriages were waiting to be unloaded. The bosses this time were Polish men who came in each day from their homes outside the camp. They told us that we had a very responsible job and to be very careful that the loading and unloading go smoothly - e not surprising as we were moving bombshells. Each one weighed 25 kilogrammes. The only time we could rest was when they had to change carriages. It was very hard work but there was no way to avoid it.

That evening we marched back to the camp very hungry. We wanted to see how much food we would get for the kind of work we had done. After a while a man

came into the barracks with a few loaves of bread. In our barracks there were one hundred and twenty people. They told us there was one loaf for eighteen people. Can you imagine how big my piece was? We also got some soup if you could call it that. The only good thing about it was that you could warm yourself up with it. I was lucky to still have a bit of money with me and if you had money you could buy something else to eat. This food was smuggled in by some of the Polish bosses. I paid for it with money I had left over from what I first brought into the camps with me. I had kept it hidden in my clothing but I didn't have a lot left so I had to be very careful. I would buy a piece of bread and a piece of garlic every day; this was my favourite meal.

The situation in this camp was particularly tragic. We had huge boxes standing in the grounds and if somebody died, or was near death, he or she was thrown into a box. It didn't take long until the boxes filled up.

I LOSE MY SISTER ANDZIA

A few days later we arrived back at the camp after work and I was told that a lady was looking for me. She had left her name and a barrack number. I was amazed to find it was my cousin Henry's wife, the cousin who was shot in Plaszow for having a piece of sausage. I was very excited and went to see her. She couldn't stop crying as she spoke about her husband but eventually she was able to tell me she had seen my sister Andzia in Plaszow. When Andzia heard that the Germans were taking a transport of prisoners somewhere, she did her best to avoid being part of it thinking that I was in Plaszow too and if she stayed put she would eventually be able to contact me. So most probably she hid until her transport left. She thought that in this way she would be able to be with me. Ironically however, it was probably the same transport that I left on. Afterwards we heard that all the people who had been caught with Christian papers, and this included Andzia, were taken on a ship and thrown into the sea alive. What had she done to deserve this? How could God look on all these things? I didn't know what to think any more.

Somehow life still had to go on. I used to think to myself, if only I knew whether I would survive all this to see what the world was going to do about it. At other times I thought that maybe I wasn't meant to go on but I lived from day to day and made the best of it. I had been in Werk C for a few weeks and each day hundreds of

people died of hunger or were shot. From my original group half were already dead but the camp was receiving more transports of people all the time.

I LOSE A FRIEND

I had two very good friends: Emek Amsterdam and Janek Ravik who came from Kalwaria, near my city. Emek decided to try to escape and wanted me to go with him. I said that even if he was lucky enough to get out of the camp he wouldn't have anywhere to go and I begged him not to risk it. Emek had his Uncle, Mr Krumholz, with him but he didn't tell him of his plan to run away. People who had tried but were caught were usually hanged, their bodies left on the gallows for twenty four hours. The day of the planned escape came and Emek said he would leave that night. When he said goodbye it was very sad; he said he would try to get into the underground army.

Two days later, we were all at work when an order came that we were to return to the camp to witness the execution of an inmate who had run away. When I heard this I just knew it would be my friend, Emek. We all went back to the camp and were lined up to watch the punishment. We waited in the camp ground, Emek's uncle standing next to me, until they brought Emek out with his head down. The German removed his revolver and pulled the trigger but even after a few bullets my friend was still standing. The German moved closer to him and shot him once more in the head. My friend fell to the ground. His uncle, who witnessed this, died himself two weeks later. How much could one person take?

THE SITUATION IMPROVES

One day we heard that the Gestapo were asking for more people because there was a shortage of workers in the factories. They asked the camp commandant what he had done with the thousands of people he had already received. I'm sure they already knew. Fortunately for us they had no more replacements for the time being and they told the commandant he had better look after the prisoners he already had. He knew that if he didn't get more people working he would finish up fighting on the front, so he had to see what he could do to reduce losses. Soon conditions improved; we received one loaf of bread for every eight people instead of one for eighteen people. The soup improved and they were not as strict as they had been.

We could have a shower every day and we all had blankets. Although we had to work very hard, we soon started to look like semi-normal people again. The best thing was receiving garments from people who had been gassed in Treblinka Concentration Camp - we knew about these things already. Not that we knew the details then but Heydrich had been appointed by Goering to carry out "The Final Solution" (extermination of all Jews in Europe) as early in the war as 31 July 1941. Treblinka death camp opened on 1 June 1942. You can not keep the sorts of things that were going on there a secret and of course this policy of mass murder was known by us and even in the west it was known - on 17 October 1942 the allied nations pledged to punish Germans for their policy of genocide.

In each garment there was money. Whatever we received - shoes, jackets, hats, belts - you were sure to find money. I was given shoes and a few garments and when I took the shoes apart, I found Russian gold pieces in them. Once we had money, the situation improved even more. We hoped it would stay that way.

For others however, the situation was horrendous things were bad. About two hundred metres from where we worked we noticed Germans digging in the forest. They put up signs forbidding entry under threat of being shot and when they finished the job they posted guards twenty four hours a day. Heavy trucks came and went - they had two doors in the back. We were very curious to know what was going on. Then we noticed a strange and very unpleasant smell that reached the camp from the site even though it was quite a distance away. Our Polish boss said that one day he would show us what was going on. The building we were working in was just opposite where the Germans were digging but the window was kept covered. Then one day our boss kept his word and let us peek around the cover. From the window we could see everything. The Germans had dug a very large and deep trench and on all sides the SS were standing with guns. In the trench a fire was kept burning all day and night. As the trucks arrived the Germans would open the back doors and before people had a chance to think about what was happening, they were stampeded into the fire alive. For the first moments you could hear the screaming and then it would be quiet. The rumour was that these people were mainly Russians and Polish Christians from high society. I am sure that even today not many people know that such methods were used. We wondered if we would end up the same way. Then, abruptly, the Germans who had been burning people alive, left. In the meantime we went to the site where so many people had lost their lives to see what

evidence remained but the Gestapo had made sure that they left next to nothing.

As I told you, our situation in the camp had improved tremendously. We had plenty of money and could buy food to supplement our meagre diet. By now it must have been about July, 1944 which made me seventeen years of age. I now know that a Soviet summer offensive had begun on June 23 and Maidanek death camp was liberated by Soviet troops on July 24. Our main wish was for the war to come to an end and as each day the Russians advanced closer and closer, this wish started to look as if it might come true. By befriending and bribing our Polish overseer I was able to be in contact with my sister Klara in Krakow and I knew she and our brother Henry were alive. At least I would have some family remaining if the war eventually came to an end.

ESCAPE

One day a rumour started going around that the Polish underground had sent a message to the camp that they might be able to help us if we could find a way out. Then we heard no more about it until we learned of a plan for a mass escape at the end of the next week. A guard was bribed to cut the wires at a spot on the perimeter fence late one night and we were all to run out. Everyone was excited at the prospect of escape and joining the underground. All went smoothly until we were deep into the surrounding forest. Then we heard gunfire and the cries of people being hit. We couldn't understand what was going on. To stay where we were meant almost certain death and so the only alternative we had was to go back to the camp. It was very dark and hard to find our way but we considered ourselves lucky when we eventually managed to escape back into the camp.

With trepidation we awaited the dawn to see what the Germans would do. Some people hid within the camp. In the meantime we found out that the people who had sent us the message were not from the regular underground but were a right wing anticommunist and antisemitic Polish group who called themselves the AK. They knew we had money and so they tricked us into an ambush. This was how they were going to try and get it from us.

In the morning the Gestapo came into the camp and called everyone out of the barracks. We were all frightened. The camp commander told us he knew what had

happened last night, about the wires being cut and that many of us had been killed but he said, from now on he was going to leave everything open and without guards. "You are free" he said, "but if you want to remain alive, this is the only place you will be able to do it." The point was we had nowhere to go and the Poles would just have readily have killed us. The commander then went on to tell us that we had a job to do - we must take all the machinery out of the camp. Our camp was an ammunition factory and machinery had to be moved out ahead of the Russian advance. The Germans needed us alive at least until this job was done.

So there was no guard any more but we stayed in the camp anyway because we felt it was safer, at least until we finished our job. For the moment the Germans needed us. The question was whether they were going to let us live after we finished? The Germans were burning lots of papers because they were frightened to leave any evidence. We could see the war was coming to an end.

OFF AGAIN

One Saturday we were told that everybody had to be outside the barracks the next morning at 10 a.m. Nobody knew the reason. When we got up on Sunday we could see Germans, Ukraines and dogs everywhere. Well, it looked as though we had finished our job and they didn't need us anymore. While we were waiting outside, they made sure no one was missing by checking all the barracks to see if anyone was hiding. When they were satisfied they had everybody, they told us we were going to be transported to another camp. Perhaps they had no need for everybody because the Germans were checking each person and if for some reason they didn't like you, they called you out and you were shot in front of the rest of the group. Those remaining were taken to the station. The Ukraines were our guards and I can't put into words the barbaric way they treated us. When we arrived we were thrown into the carriages. We had no idea where they were taking us or what was going to happen to us.

By evening we had reached a station, Piotrkow. As we looked through the little wired window, we could see Gestapo with machine-guns and dogs waiting for us. The way the Gestapo were armed we thought it was the end for us all. The carriage doors were opened and we were counted. I had never seen such strict security. As we were marching to our unknown destination, one man from our group, a doctor,

swallowed some tablets and collapsed. The Germans picked him up and drove away with him, where we did not know. We were not beaten as was usual and the Germans hardly said a word. We stopped in front of a jail in Piotrkow and were eventually taken inside. The Germans told us that they would leave us but would be back to pick us up in the morning. Inside the jail, we spoke to some of the prisoners. They told us, "From this jail nobody goes out alive". What awful news this was. In the previous camp we were told that once we had done our job they would look after us but if what the prisoners told us was true, it didn't look like any of us were going to make it. We had to have patience and see what would happen the next day.

In the morning the Germans arrived as they had said. They let us have a wash and we were given a piece of bread. They told us they had orders to take us to work in Piotrkow and we were going to dig trenches and lay mines. It sounded plausible and we believed them. We were picked up in army trucks and taken to work. We were guarded by the same Germans as the previous day but they were not as bad as they had been yesterday and they even became quite friendly. We asked them why they had been carrying machine-guns and had dogs when they picked us up at the station. They said they were told they were there to pick up murderers and therefore had to be prepared.

While we worked the Germans hardly guarded us as they had now realised we were not murderers. The work was not very hard and we were all glad of the fresh air. Another good thing was we didn't have to go back to a camp after we finished work, but we were moved to a private property instead. We didn't have any beds but we had plenty of straw to sleep on. As days went by we heard that the Russian hadn't advanced any further. We knew the job we were doing was only temporary and if the war did not end soon, we didn't know where we would finish up. Even the Germans didn't seem know where we would be taken once there was no more work left to do.

OUR LAST CAMP IN POLAND

It didn't take long till we were soon on our way to a new destination. This time we were transported to a camp called Czestochowannka in the city of Czestochowa. It is quite a famous pilgrimage centre even today and Poles travel from all over Poland to pray to the Virgin Mary. In a sense we were back where we started; it was a

concentration camp again. The guards were Ukrainians and the majority of the jobs were done inside the camp. The facilities were not too bad considering, although it took us a long time to settle. This time our bosses were Germans so it wasn't so easy, but if you had money you could buy things, although the risk was greater. For any little thing that somebody smuggled in, there was a death sentence if you were caught. On our arrival at the camp what little luggage - a few extra garments- we had accumulated during our "wealthy" days in Skarzysko was taken away so we only had the clothes we were wearing left. I had quite a bit of money hidden on me but the risk of trying to use it was too great to take.

The job assigned to me was to work at the station. Carriages used to pass laden with potatoes and we would steal some of them and hide them in the ground so when we went back to the barracks we could take a few potatoes with us. The station was within the outer perimeter of the camp so we were unlikely to be searched. At the barracks we tapped into an electric power line placing an outlet of sorts behind a bunk. Using a makeshift electric fork we were able to cook the potatoes.

I was very lucky with my jobs but not everybody was so lucky. For instance, those who worked in the inner part of the camp had less opportunities than I to smuggle or barter. The work consisted of making parts for tanks and trucks. It wasn't very hard but the problem was we were not given enough food. We all had plenty of money with us but as I mentioned before the risk of using it was too great to take. If you were caught selling or buying from an outsider there would be no excuse, the penalty would be death. Two brothers were caught selling a piece of leather to an outsider. Their punishment was hanging and their bodies were left dangling from the gallows forty eight hours. While these punishments were metered out, we all had to be present. Can you imagine those two boys' father had to witness his sons' hanging.

As I said, I was very lucky to have the job at the station. Germans used to come to load coals on the trucks and I was asked to help them. After working with them for a while, they asked how I came to be in a concentration camp. I told them what had happened to me and that I had no parents. According to them, they didn't have a clue about what had been going on. They told me they had just come back from fighting at the front. The next time they came to work they brought me food and warm clothes. I cried with gratitude. They told me not to worry and whenever they

could, they always brought me food. Unfortunately, after two weeks they were transported to a different place and I had to go back to my normal job.

ALMOST LIBERATED BY THE RUSSIANS

In the meantime we received very good news: the Russians had started a new offensive. Warsaw was liberated by Soviet troops on January 17, 1945 but we were about two hundred kilometres to the south west. Not far from us there were Russian prisoners working. They sent us a message to say that according to their information, the Russians should be here very soon. When we received this news we were very excited. Some of our men were working in the spray factory where the tanks came to be repainted. On those tanks the position where the fighting was going on was marked - this is how we knew where the Russians were. According to this information the Russians could be at our camp in a very short time. This realisation brought panic to the camp and no one knew what to do. We had found ourselves in a similar situation before when many of our people had been killed unnecessarily. We hoped this would not happen again. We could see this time the situation was more serious and many were trying to make hiding places in the camp. We hoped the Russians would come fast enough to save us.

When we woke one morning, the whole area of the camp and the city was in darkness. As the Russians approached, they used some kind of product to make the whole area go foggy, like one big cloud. The Germans were running here and there in disarray not knowing what to do next. One hour later we heard over the loudspeaker system that everybody had to come out of the barracks, quickly. They told us we were being evacuated from the camp to a different camp in the city. The name of the camp we were supposed to be going to was Pelcer but we were not sure if this was the truth. We didn't know if such a camp even existed. Maybe it was a trick and they were going to kill us rather than let us be liberated by the Russians but we later found that apparently this city really did have three camps. We left under very strict Ukrainian guard and were taken into the new camp where we soon found out why they had brought us there; they were trying to get us onto transportation to Germany but for the time being they had no carriages.

We were there only a short time when all the people from our camp were called to come forward and taken to the station. We could see Germans running about in a

panic not knowing what to do. The Russians were obviously very close and we were guarded very strictly.

As we arrived at the station I felt I had to do something. I managed to run into a toilet and while I was in there all kinds of things were going through my mind: what to do; what if the Russians didn't advance this far, where would I go? I decided to leave it to fate: I would go out and if the train hadn't left, I would rejoin the transport. As fate would have it when I went out they were all still there in the carriages, locked. I went to the Ukrainian guard and told him that I had been in the toilet. He opened the door for me. A few minutes after we left, the Russians had taken the city. You can imagine how I felt: I had been so close to being reunited with my sister and brother, but it didn't look as though I deserved freedom yet. The people in the carriage thought I had been a fool to return to them, but it may have been worse - in the previous camp in a similar situation, hundreds of people had lost their lives. We were on our way to Germany and what was our destiny to be? I didn't believe I could survive now: the only thing to do was hope and wait. Quite often I prayed to God for help, but now I had no more tears or strength left. Two weeks before, I had been in contact with my sister and brother so at least if something happened to me now there were some members of our family left who had survived the war.

BUCHENWALD DEATH CAMP

We travelled for two days without food or water and then finally the train stopped and the doors were opened. Germans with dogs greeted us. We had arrived at a place called Buchenwald. A huge gate opened for us and we were welcomed by an orchestra. We didn't know what to make of it. We could see a huge camp with many barracks very strictly guarded. This was something we hadn't seen for quite a while. There were thousands of people. They all looked like skeletons and could hardly walk. We were taken to a place where we were asked our names and date of birth, then we were told to undress and if we had any gold or valuables they had to be thrown into boxes. When it came to be my turn, I approached one of the boxes, discreetly removed a diamond while pretending to deposit something in the box and hid it in my mouth. Later this diamond was to save my life. Next we were shaved and disinfected. This was the only place where there were no lice. Then we were given a striped uniform and a striped hat to wear and we were also given a number;

mine was 116001, but in Buchenwald it was not the policy to brand it on. This number, with my name alongside it, can be found registered at Buchenwald to this day.

It was January 1945, winter time and it was very cold. The uniform given to us was of a light summer material and we were told we had to leave the shirt collar open. We were then segregated into barracks - ours was number 55. The man in charge's name was Gustav and we later found out we were very lucky to have him because he was one of the top men in the camp. We heard that he belonged to the underground army - the camp's secret organisation. Whenever another transport of people arrived, this underground group were given the names of whoever was spying for and collaborating with the Germans. These collaborators were punished - some were given rotten jobs, others received a death sentence.

In each of the barracks there were hundreds of people. We had four storey bunks and in each section there were fifteen people. As soon as you entered the barracks you had to lie in bed. You couldn't sit in it so you had to be in a lying position with your head facing the front. We were not working and were given very little food and so for the first time I thought I was going to starve to death. One day I was walking up some steps and felt so weak that by the time I reached the top I fell down again. I knew the only way to get my strength back would be to find a piece of bread, but this was only a dream.

Buchenwald had gas chambers but there was little need to gas people who were dying from hunger anyway. The one good thing we had in Buchenwald was cleanliness. Buchenwald was the only camp that was strict about cleanliness. Our barracks had to be cleaned every day and were inspected nearly as often. One day after we had finished our soup and the dishes were washed, a German came in to inspect the dishes to see if they were clean enough. They obviously weren't because he became angry and sacked the man who was supposed to do them. I was lying on my bunk nearby and I said to the German that I was willing to do the dishes to his satisfaction. He called me down and told me that if I could do this I could have the leftovers from the barrel. This meant the difference between life and death for me. I could have enough soup to eat and and I could help others. I had to wash three hundred dishes and clean the barrel, but I had no trouble; I helped the boys with a bit of extra soup and they helped me clean the dishes. We made very sure it was to

the German's satisfaction.

After I had been in Buchenwald a while, I heard that a train went to Weinmarck every day taking people to work. The Allies were bombing the city frequently and a detail was sent to clean up some of the rubble. I managed to get this job by getting up very early every day to be there when the train left. It was a very good job. We used to love watching when the Allies bombed the city and the Germans, instead of guarding us, ran for their lives. In the meantime we had a good opportunity to look for food. From the time I started going to Weinmarck, I had no further fears of starvation. The main trouble came at night, about 7 o'clock, when everyone had to leave the barracks so we could be counted. We stood for hours every night and it was winter time. At least we were allowed to take our blankets but if someone was missing there were long delays. Quite often the weak and the sick had fallen into the trough that was used as a toilet and there was no way of finding them. In the meantime a lot of people would freeze to death. We weren't allowed to touch the bodies until they were counted.

You can see what further misery I suffered because of the mistake I made, not escaping when I had the chance on the railway station at Czestochowa. I could have been a free man! I couldn't forgive myself. Who knew what would happen to me?

One night someone came into our barracks, woke me up and told me to come with him. I asked what I had done and where he was taking me but he said nothing. I must have done something. As we were walking, I could see lots of people waiting outside and so I asked what had happened and if anyone knew where they were taking us. Nobody knew.

The day before, I had a very bad toothache. I couldn't take the pain so I went to a German dentist who was only supposed to treat the Germans in the camp. I knew that I was not allowed to go in but I did anyway and stood there shaking. The German asked me what I wanted and I begged him to give me something for the pain. I must say he was very nice, he asked me to sit down and he took out two of my teeth. I thought this must be the reason I was being summoned at night. But soon I discovered the real reason - they packed us into railway carriages and we were on our way again.

I still don't know why I was singled out from all the people in my barracks to be placed on this transport. It separated me from my last remaining teenage friend, Janek Ravik, with whom I and others shared a bunk. Emek Amsterdam, Janek and myself had once been a close threesome, but Emek had been executed back in the Skarzysko camp and I was now forced to part company from Janek. Later I learned that Janek and many of the inmates of Buchenwald were murdered by the Germans just a few days before the camp was liberated by the Americans. The Germans were keen to finish off the job of exterminating Jews. It no doubt would have been my fate too had I still been there.

THE FLOSSENBURG WORK CAMP

No one knew where we were going although, as usual, there were all kinds of rumours going around. We were exhausted and very worried about what was going to happen next. Being constantly moved from camp to camp was awful - bad as it was you got used to your hell hole but when you were moved you didn't know what was ahead. After hours of travelling we arrived at a smallish camp called Flossenbourg. As we walked in we were greeted by Jewish kapos. We were counted and put into our barracks. Once inside the kapo in charge told us we were fortunate to come to this barracks because it was the best in the camp. If we kept to their rules, we shouldn't have any problems, otherwise, God help us. Before long we were given a plate of soup and a piece of bread and then the main boss came to introduce himself. He also told us how lucky we were to be here and told us all the regulations we had to keep. Now, he said, you can all eat.

I had a little teaspoon I carried with me from camp to camp because I was frightened of catching disease. The man in charge noticed that I was eating with my little teaspoon and he asked why I was not using a large spoon. I told him that I always ate with my own spoon. He looked at me. Early the next morning he sent for me although I couldn't understand why. I asked those people who had been in this camp for a while what they thought he might want. They told me there must be a reason and whatever it was, I would most likely get twenty five lashes or worse. I knocked at the door, and was invited to enter. He asked me my name and where I came from. After some small talk, he asked me to have breakfast with him. Then he asked me to have lunch with him too. I couldn't believe it. But when lunchtime came I couldn't get away from work. When we returned to the barracks a man had

been sent to summons me to go explain why I had not come for lunch. I assume the explanation of this abundant friendliness was that this man perceived me to be a clean person after seeing me eat with my own spoon. He liked that and became friendly. After I gained his confidence, he told me that he had come to this camp as a Christian and no one knew he was Jewish. He spoke perfect German, this was how he got his job. He was always very nice to me and he made sure I had plenty to eat.

Our job in this camp was to produce anti-tank ammunition but each time we installed the machinery and were nearly ready to go into production, the Allies destroyed the factory. They seem to have been very well informed. Bombing took place mainly at night but our camp was a little away from the factory so nothing happened to us.

After we'd been at this camp a while, a transport of Hungarian Jews arrived. They were very weak and hungry; many were dying. We tried to help them but we had trouble communicating with them. At work they suffered a lot too because most of them couldn't speak German and therefore couldn't understand what the Germans were saying to them.

The allies kept bombing and so there was little point in us continuing to build factories. Instead we were sent to work outside the camp clearing roads and buildings that had been bombed. One day a few young Germans asked us to accompany them to a place where they pointed out rocks they wanted removed. The rocks were so large that it was impossible to shift them but they insisted we do so. Those soldiers were no more than fifteen or sixteen years of age but this didn't stop them beating us. But the rocks were too heavy so nothing could be done. Later we saw that they had done this just for fun.

There were rumours that the Red Cross was coming to inspect the camp and some of us might be exchanged. We didn't know if this was true but after a few days we were told the camp and the barracks had to be sparkling clean. They announced that on Saturday afternoon we were all going to have a bath and be disinfected and confirmed that the Red Cross was coming to visit us. We all went to have a wash and be disinfected. I couldn't have imagined what kind of an experience this disinfection session would turn out to be for me.

When we arrived at the disinfection area we were asked to undress and we were given a large dish of water. After having my wash I went to get my clothes but found that my trousers had been stolen and the only thing I had left to wear was my shirt. I had no underwear and was practically naked. I didn't know what to do. My friends suggested I go to the storeroom and maybe I would be able to get a pair of trousers. I went there and the German asked me what I wanted. I told him that somebody had stolen my trousers and luckily, I was given another pair of trousers but when I looked at them they were covered with thousands of lice. I was so upset I lost my head and threw them in the German's face and walked away. I really didn't know what I was doing. To this day I don't know why he didn't shoot me on the spot. After all the fracas I still didn't have any trousers and I needed them so badly I went back to get the pair I had thrown at the German. Before wearing them, I boiled them to get rid of the lice. I had been so upset because I had always maintained my dignity by keeping very clean.

On Sunday the Red Cross arrived and so we were all given a special soup and a packet of biscuits. The Germans had it organised so that we couldn't say anything to the Red Cross people. The Red Cross came, looked at the camp, were shown how nice the barracks were by the Germans and then they left.

HORRORS ON THE WAY TO HELL

The Allies were bombing constantly and nothing could be produced in the camp. Having no more work for us the Germans decided to evacuate the camp. Every day they transported people out, where to nobody knew. The day came when they were ready for us, and we were all packed into carriages. A man I didn't recognise asked me to come to his carriage because there were less people there. After talking to him for a while I recognised him; he came from our city. This was the first time I had seen him in the camp. In this transport there were 1,500 people. We had been travelling for four days but were not given any food. People were dying and the dead bodies remained with us until the train stopped. The smell inside the carriage was unbearable. When the train finally stopped, we found we were in Czechoslovakia. We were asked to dig graves and the bodies of those who perished in transit, were thrown in. We also found out why we had been travelling for so long. The Allies were bombing the train lines and so we couldn't pass. After the

train had been there a while the local people found out that we were inside the train and they begged the Germans to be allowed to give us some food. But the Germans would not let any food in. Still they persisted. Many people, including ladies with children, were coming close to our carriages hoping they would be able to pass some food in to us. The Germans didn't know what to do so they took the food from them, telling them they would give the food to us, but no one received anything.

When we set off again one of the men in our carriage decided to try to escape. He managed to make a hole in the carriage floor and as the train was slowing down to stop, he tried to get out of the carriage. But in the process his legs and hands were severed. Once the train stopped, we could see his mutilated body lying there. We begged the Germans to finish him off, but because he had tried to run away they let him bleed to death.

By now we were into our eighth day of travelling and we had had no food. We sipped water from what little seeped into the carriage. We couldn't understand where they were trying to take us but we understood that if they needed us, they would have given us something to eat. One man who had been a kapo in the camp was travelling with us and when the train stopped at a station, he bribed the Germans so that they allowed him to buy a little bag of sugar. After that the people in our carriage had a little bit of sugar every day. I was very lucky to be in this carriage.

One day at a station I was picked to get the bodies out of the carriages for burial. There were dozens of dead bodies all tangled together and it was very hard to separate them. It was shocking to look at them and I would never have believed I could handle this. When I first saw them, I was nearly sick but after a while it didn't worry me at all. We were not human any more - we were worse than animals. We couldn't understand why they were bothering with us - we were dying by the hundreds and they would have been better off shooting us all.

THE END OF THE JOURNEY: MAUTHAUSEN DEATH CAMP

We had been travelling for fourteen days and the only thing that kept us going was the bit of sugar but this came to an end. If we had to travel any longer, the Germans would have to bury us themselves because there would be none of us left to do it.

The time had come when we didn't care any more. We had been travelling for fifteen days when the train stopped, the doors opened and we were told to get out but hardly anyone could get out. They told us we were in Austria in a camp called Mauthausen. Some people were lucky. As we were walking to the camp, they dropped dead. At least there was no more suffering for them. Out of 1,500 people there were only 470 left.

We arrived early on a rainy, snowy morning. The huge gate opened to Mauthausen and we were taken directly to the crematorium. We then realised what was going to happen to us; we only hoped it wouldn't take too long. While we were standing there, a boy who was working in the crematorium recognised me - he had been a neighbour in Poland. He tried to cheer me up and told me not to worry because he said he was sure he could save me from being gassed. I told him that I really didn't care any more. I still had the very nice diamond that I secreted on me in Buchenwald. I tried to give him the last thing I had, the diamond, but he didn't want it. I said that if I lived he could give it back to me so he took it. We were standing for hours and were not given anything to eat. It was now eight at night and we were still waiting. We begged them to finish us off. Meanwhile we found out why it was taking them so long - the day before two thousand Romanian girls had arrived. They had all been gassed and they had to be cremated and this was the cause of the delay. While we were waiting a man from the camp passed carrying a few loaves of bread. I grabbed a piece and stuffed it straight into my mouth. It was the first time in my life that I had done this.

We had been waiting for twenty hours; we asked the Germans what was happening. The answer was that it shouldn't be too long. Some were lucky and died while they were waiting. Very late that night, we were told we were going to have a shower. We all knew what kind of a shower we were going to have. As we walked into the shower room, we all looked to see when they would close the door behind us, but it was true, we were given a shower. Afterwards, we were ordered to leave all our clothes and instead we were given a belt and marched naked to what they called the hospital. I was in fact just a large barracks. We walked inside to find dead bodies lying everywhere. To get through, you had to walk on top of the bodies. You could see some of them were still alive. There was even evidence of cannibalism - corpses with bits of flesh removed.

THE WILL TO LIVE

In the barrack there were triple decker beds. On each level there were six people, three with their head up one way and three the other. The belts we had been given were for our heads to rest on as there was not enough width for three heads across. We were forbidden to get down except once a week when we could have a shower. We were certainly not allowed to go outside the barracks. Everything had to be done in the bed, including toilet. We were given a new number; mine was 111. After two days in Mauthausen I wished I'd died before I came there. No one would believe the conditions we had to live in. The Germans had no more use for us and were just leaving us to die.

After lying in bed for two days I was so filthy I didn't care about living any more. I thought to myself if I hadn't given the diamond away maybe I could have done something with it - maybe I still could. I decided that at night I would go to see the man who was in charge of this barrack. It was a risk but I had nothing to lose. That night I sought him out and told him I had the most beautiful diamond and if he could help me I would give it to him. I was glad he took me seriously and listened to me. He asked to see the diamond and so I explained that while we were waiting at the crematorium I had given it to my friend. He appeared very interested and said that in the morning he would let me have a wash and I would be given clothes and could then go and seek out my friend. I was very relieved. Good to his word early the next morning the man came to see me, let me have a wash and gave me some clothes. I was only hoping that I would still be able to find my friend and get the diamond.

It turned out that the boss of our barracks used to work at the crematorium himself and thought he probably knew my friend. When we got there he did recognise him and they seemed happy to see one another. He told my friend not to worry and that he would look after me. My friend gave me the diamond and when we got back to the barracks I passed it on to the boss. He told me I could keep my uniform and I was given a job as a cleaner. I also had a bed on my own next to the people that were employed and at night he used to give me a bit of food. It is hard to explain what this meant. I expect that I would not otherwise have survived more than a few days in such conditions and what an irony that would have been with the war about to finish any day.

Before long there were no longer any crematoria or gas chambers in the camp as the Germans were trying to leave as little evidence as possible. The war was coming to an end but for us it was not quick enough because people were still dying by the thousands. My former neighbour, to whom I had given the diamond, had gone into hiding. He had been working in the crematorium and the Germans particularly wanted to kill the crematorium workers because they knew exactly how many people had been gassed and would make the best witnesses. But one day I got very bad news - I heard he had been found and shot. I was really shocked - that boy had tried to save my life - but what could one do?

LIBERATION

We heard that our camp had had explosives laid through it and that in the last minutes we would all be blown up. The way the Germans were panicking it couldn't be much longer. We could hear the guns and we all now hoped for a miracle. One day all the SS guards left and their jobs were taken over by ordinary soldiers. We were very happy to see this.

A few hours later, our miracle came. It is very hard to describe that moment. People were screaming and crying; "Run to the main gate, the Americans are here." I was one of the lucky ones - I was still able to run. We still couldn't believe it was true, but when we saw the German guards throwing down their guns and putting their hands up. We knew we were free. While we were overjoyed the Americans were subdued as they were now seeing the horrors of the camp and experiencing something the rest of the world couldn't believe.

This day was 5th May 1945. The Americans said they had heard the camp was to be blown up so they came quickly but the war was not over yet. They asked if there were any people well enough to look after the camp as they had to go back to the front. It was amazing when the food started arriving at the camp but unfortunately tragic too because many of the starving inmates had not been able to digest the food and died. This sort of thing is well known now but wasn't then. Three days later, the war ended.

The Americans built temporary hospitals in the camp but I and a boy I had become

friendly with in Mauthausen were lucky to be comparatively healthy when the war finished so we decided to leave the camp. We hoped we would be able to find some accommodation outside. As we walked along, we saw an Austrian family working outside their house and asked if they had a room for us. We had no money to pay them but hoped to appeal to their better nature. They said they didn't have a room but if we liked they did have a shed with straw. We didn't want to go back to the camp so we accepted the shed. After we'd been there for two days, the same people gave us a very nice room. They had had the room all along but they'd been frightened to take in strangers. Perhaps their motive was that the Russians, who were not very far away, were rumoured to be raping and looting and if these Austrians appeared to be showing some compassion towards camp survivors, it might give them some level of immunity.

One day we heard that whoever had been in the camp had to go back to be registered with the Jewish committee. Since I was trying to get in touch with whoever of my family in Poland might have survived, I went back to register. I knocked at the door and it was opened by a man I knew in the camp as a kapo, but nonetheless a good man. I said I was sorry and that I was looking for the Jewish committee. He said that he was with that committee and that he was Jewish, not Christian, as I'd thought when I was an inmate. I was astounded - he was so respected in the camp and he'd held such a high position from which he had tried to help everyone he could. I am sure it never occurred to anyone that he was a Jew and if it had, he would not have been able to do what he did. His real name was Katz and unfortunately he was killed in a motorbike accident in Italy two weeks after the war.

After I had registered I hoped soon to be in contact with my sister Klara and brother Henry. I knew that they were still alive just days before the war ended in Poland and so I could assume they had survived. I wasn't sure about my youngest sister Genia as she had been taken by the Germans and we hadn't heard anything since. I hoped very much that she might still be alive. At first I thought I would go back to Poland but there were rumours going around that anyone who went back from a camp was being sent to Siberia so I hesitated. I did write letters to Poland but I didn't get any answers.

After a short time in Austria the Jewish brigade took all the young kids to Santa

Maria in Italy, where we were very well looked after. I again tried to get in touch with my sister and brother but unfortunately, again without success. I then met a man, originally from Dzialoszyce, who had just come back from Poland. He had seen my brother Henry and so he was able to confirm that Henry and my sister Klara had both survived the war. Unfortunately our younger sister Genia had been taken to Auschwitz where he was told she had died. He also reported that in Poland they had heard nothing from me and they didn't know if I was alive. One of the Jewish soldiers told me to write a letter and he would try to do something. This was typical; people were trying to help us in any way they could. We were given free transport, food and money and we were having a very good time in Italy but my main desire was still to be reunited with my sister and brother.

BOUND FOR PALESTINE

We were told that in a short time we would be going to Palestine. But if I went to Israel I didn't know if I would ever see my family. I was only eighteen years of age and didn't know what to do. I spoke to my friends and they were all going. It was very hard for me to make the decision but when the time came I decided to go. All the girls and boys were singing and dancing for joy because we were on our way to Palestine but I was quite sad, not knowing if I had made the right decision. Lots of my friends had families in Palestine; my friend had a sister and an uncle but I didn't have anyone.

After a few days we arrived in Haifa which was a really beautiful port. Lots of people were waiting to welcome us because we were the first transport to arrive after the war. As we came down from the ship people were hugging us, there was singing and music was playing. Whoever had a family went home with them. Those who didn't have anybody were taken on buses to a place called Magdile. All the children from the local school were waiting outside to welcome us; it was a really good feeling. After we'd been in Magdile for two days we were told we would be working half a day and the rest of the day we would go to school. We were all very well looked after and were very happy but after only a short time many of us had the same problem; there was no shortage of food, no shortage of anything, but we missed our families.

After trying for a long time to get in touch with my sister and brother I finally

received my first letter. I was so excited I cried for joy. My sister told me to try to come to Poland and it wasn't long before she sent me some money. I went to the Polish Consulate to enquire about transport and to see how quickly I could get there. They told me I had to make an application for a passport. I had no trouble and received my Polish passport in due course and straight away went to make a booking. Soon I had everything arranged. I had been in Palestine for over a year and now I felt guilty to leave all my friends, with whom I had such a lot in common, but to me family was the most important.

REUNITED WITH MY REMAINING FAMILY

I left Palestine in November 1947. While I was on the plane to Prague I pondered over my fortune and couldn't believe this was really happening to me. I was very excited. When I arrived in Prague I rang and told my sister what time I would arrive in Poland. I had to travel all night by train. Finally I arrived in Poland early in the morning. My brother-in-law, whom I had never met, was waiting for me at the station. My sister Klara couldn't come because she had a small baby. It was a very good feeling when I arrived home. We were all crying for joy. My sister prepared the most beautiful dinner, but with all the excitement I couldn't eat a thing. I was in Poland for quite a while and had a good enough time, but after all we had been through there I just couldn't make a new start. I really wanted to go somewhere very far away to forget everything.

We made a decision to leave the country but for me to leave Poland was not easy because I was twenty years of age and due for army service. My sister already had an exit visa but I couldn't get one. One day I went for a skiing holiday near the border and observed that the boundary was only lightly patrolled. When I got home I told my sister that I had decided to cross the border. They were very afraid that something would happen to me but I decided it was the only way I could leave. Arrangements were made with a man to guide me across into Czechoslovakia. He ended up double crossing me and so it wasn't easy, but I eventually made it and after some travel, I finally arrived in Austria.

BOUND FOR AUSTRALIA

One of the first things I did when I got to Austria was to get in touch with the

Australian Consulate. Soon I received a letter from them asking me to come in for an interview. I hoped I would be accepted as I knew they had very strict quotas. They told me I was accepted but that I would have to do a two year contract and I would have to take any job that I was given. I was very grateful and relieved. Now all I had to do was await my turn. I was actually having the most wonderful time in Austria and really wouldn't have minded staying a few more years but it didn't take long until I received a letter from the Australian Consulate to be ready. The transport was leaving in one week for Italy. We went by train to Napoli and waited there for a ship to Australia.

After a month in Napoli we were informed that in two days we were leaving for Australia aboard a ship called Goya. It was by no means a luxury ship but actually a Norwegian vessel converted from a warship to a passenger ship. We left Napoli on 20th November 1949. I really wasn't a very good passenger; from the time we left Napoli to the time we arrived at Melbourne I was very sea sick but it didn't worry me because I knew at the end of it I would be in Australia.

We docked in Melbourne on 25th December 1949. Even though I knew nothing about the country I was nevertheless the happiest boy in the world. I really felt at home. From Melbourne we were taken to a place called Bonogilla where we stayed a month. In Bonogilla we had nothing to do although we were waiting to be employed and in the meantime we enjoyed ourselves. Nearly every day we were hunting rabbits; it was a very good experience. Soon I was told I would be getting a job picking fruit at Tatura near Shepparton. We were driven there and the next morning started picking fruit. I was very happy there but it was only a seasonal job and so I had many different jobs during my two year contract. When I finished the contract I received a certificate from the Australian Government thanking me for my efforts.

EPILOGUE

Starting afresh in a new country wasn't easy for me at first. My main problem was the language but I tried very hard and it didn't take too long before I was able to communicate reasonably well. I knew this was going to be my country and so the time couldn't come quickly enough for me to be eligible for naturalisation. I have been in Sydney now for forty years and have worked very hard but I have never

complained and I've been happy. My sister and her family are here too; we are in frequent contact and live only a short walk away from one another. Our brother is also in Australia but lives in Melbourne and we are less close. I remain thankful to the Australian Government for allowing me to come to a country where you can work and have all the freedom in the world.

During all these years in Australia I have wanted to write this story of what I myself went through, a story, that if I had not experienced it myself, I would find hard to believe.

To conclude, I have one main wish in my life. I hope no one in the whole world experiences in life what I did. I am now 62 years of age and I have been married for 35 years. I am blessed with a very good wife and two nice children - a son and a daughter. They are both very happily married and each have two children. Hopefully we will still be able to spend a lot of time with our grandchildren.